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# HUMORS OF THE COOKERY-BOOK.

BY AGNES REPPLIER.

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“THERE does not, at this blessed moment, breathe on the earth’s surface a human being that willna prefer eating and drinking to all ither pleasures o’ body or soul.” So speaks the Ettrick Shepherd, in the fulness of his content, contemplating with moist eyes the groaning supper-table, laden with a comfortable array of solid viands; after which fair and frank expression of his views we are somewhat pained to hear him denouncing in no measured terms “the awful and fearsome vice o’ gluttony,” as evidenced occasionally in women. His companions, too, those magnificent fellow-feeders, have a great many severe things to say about gude-wives who betray a weakness for roasted pork or an unfeminine solicitude for gravy; and Mr. Timothy Tickler unhesitatingly affirms that such a one, “eating for the sake of eating, and not for mere nourishment, is, in fact, the grossest of sensualists, and at each mouthful virtually breaks all ten of the commandments.” This is the language of an ascetic rather than of a *bon vivant*, but we are in some measure reassured when the same Mr. Tickler confesses, a little later, that, although roast goose always disagrees with him, yet he never refuses it, believing that to purchase pleasure by a certain degree of pain is true philosophy; whereupon the Shepherd, not to be outdone, gives it as his unreserved opinion that, in winter-time at least, “eating for eating’s sake, and in oblivion o’ its feenal cause, is the most sacred o’ household duties.”

From these somewhat inharmonious sentiments we reluctantly infer that gluttony is a vice—or a virtue—for man only, and that woman’s part in the programme is purely that of a ministering angel. Adam was made to eat, and Eve to cook for him, although even in this humble sphere she and her daughters have been doomed to rank second in command. Excellent in all things, but supreme in none, they have never yet scaled the

dazzling heights of culinary fame. The records of antiquity make no mention of their skill; the middle ages grant them neither praise nor honor; and even as late as Dr. Johnson's day they labored hard for scanty recognition. It is very painful to hear the great sage speaking lightly of our grandmother's oracle, Mrs. Glasse, and declaring with robust contempt that women were fit to spin, but not to write a book of cookery. Yet for how many years had they modestly held their peace; for how many years had this department of literature remained in their masters' hands!

Amid the fast-growing epicureanism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—for the Plantagenets were noble eaters, and gave an admirable example to the kingdom—we find all information on the subject emanating from the pens of learned and perhaps saintly men. The oldest treatise that has been preserved is the work of the venerable Archbishop Neckam, of Saint Albans, written in Latin and highly unintelligible Norman French, and destined as a guide for youthful house-keepers, who, even in that early day, had begun to suffer instruction for their husbands' sakes. The "Form of Cury" is a roll of one hundred and ninety-six recipes contributed, a full century later, by the master-cook of Richard II., and professes to have for its modest object "the preparing of pottages and meats for the household, as they should be made, craftily and wholesomely"; though some of these crafty dishes are as costly in their character as those in the "Noble Boke of Cookery," so often reëdited and republished, and which is principally interesting as proving to us how much time and money could be expended upon a royal table. Yet the poor were not altogether forgotten, for in 1620 Tobias Venner, a Somersetshire man, gave to the world his little volume called "*Via Recta ad Vitam Longam*," full of practical and homely advice to the lower rural classes, who must, in many cases, have been unable to profit by it, owing to their education being in as primitive a stage of development as William of Deloraine's. "The Art of Cookery Refined and Augmented," published by the master of Charles the First's kitchen, gives us also, side by side with wonderful and elaborate "subtleties," such plain and wholesome dishes as hasty pudding and barley pudding, which were as familiar to ploughmen as to kings; while, with the advent of the Puritans, cooking, like all the sister-arts, suffered a lamentable

eclipse. Those noble pastries, those flaunting peacocks, those boars' heads served on silver platters, those soul-inspiring wassail-cups, vanished from saintly England.

"Plum-broth was Popish, and mince-pie,  
O, that was flat idolatry!"

A significant token left us from these dismal days is a little book, printed after the Restoration, and entitled "*The Court and Kitchen of Joan Cromwell*," wherein we learn that the Protector's household was a well-ordered and frugal one, and that to its master was not permitted the luxury of an orange with his veal, because oranges could not be bought for less than a groat apiece.

But all this time women were silent, profiting, doubtless, in many a roomy kitchen and in many a well-stocked buttery, by the words of wisdom which vainglorious men let fall; and only now and then giving help and counsel to one another by means of little private receipt-books, which were circulated among a few noble families, and were considered as their own exclusive property and pride. Such were "*My Lady Rennelagh's Choice Receipts*," which may still be read among the Sloane MSS.; and such, too, was "*The Countesse of Rutland's Receipt for making the rare Banbury Cake*, which was so much praised at her daughter's (the Right Honourable the Lady Chaworth's) wedding." And the fame of this distinguished cake was so widespread that, after a while, we come upon it—titles and all—in that weird little volume "*The Queen's Closet Opened*," published in 1662, which contains a hoard of "*Incomparable Secrets in Physick, Chyrugery, Preserving and Candyng*," all of which, we are assured, were presented to her Majesty the Queen "By the most Experienced Persons of the Times, many whereof were had in esteem, when she pleased to descend to private Recreations." In this company we behold only the most distinguished names. Like Mrs. Jarley, it appears to have been the delight of the nobility and gentry, and many of the recipes are the fair fruits of royal meditations. Here, for example, are two perfumes, one the invention of Edward VI. and one of Queen Elizabeth, who had a notoriously dainty nose; also a medicine for the plague, which was Queen Mary's especial secret, and imparted by her to the Lord Mayor of London. And here is a cake, a very plain and wholesome cake, made by the poor young Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of Charles I.; and a strawberry cordial bequeathed to us by Sir Walter Raleigh; and the Earl of

Arundel's posset ; and Lord Bacon's home-brewed ale ; and Sir Kenelm Digby's *aqua mirabilis* ; and the Bishop of Worcester's "admirable curing powder," of which the principal ingredients seem to be adder-skins and the "black tips of crab's claws taken when the Sun enters Cancer, which is every year on the eleventh day of June."

Many of the most infallible remedies read as if they might have been concocted in that unholy cauldron which *Macbeth* saw bubbling in the witches' cave. Dr. Atkin's jaundice powder, for instance, made of earth-worms, nicely slit, and washed with white wine ; a sadly impenetrable "Plaister of Paracelsus" ; and "An Excellent Snail Water," with five hundred snails in it. The costly nature of the preparations is another warrant for the good society they were expected to keep. It does not lie in the power of ordinary consumptives to take pills made of amber and pearl and coral, if they even believed these substances to be nourishing and digestible. The recipes for "Sugar of Roses," for "A delicate Almond Oil to remove the shining of the Nose," and for "A Carp Pye fit for the Pope," hint plainly at vanity and luxurious living ; the very words "A great rich Cake" stir the heart with an echo of past cheer ; and "A Pulpatoon of Pigeons" is doubtless the noble and honored progenitor of Lord Beaconsfield's "pompetone of larks." On the other hand, a leg of mutton stuffed with pickled herrings seems like the invention of a culinary humorist ; and "How to make a fat Lamb of a Pig" is a case of pure imposture, the beginning of that long and melancholy list of "mock" dishes which lose their own honest flavor in an ambitious struggle to be taken for something better. Imagine Elia's disgust at an imitation lamb rising, like a false phoenix, from the ashes of his favorite pig.

Opulence and a taste for display, upon the one side, and the natural conservatism of the great Saxon stock, upon the other, fought the battle of the table from the days of the Black Prince down to those of Anthony Trollope, and will, in all probability, fight it to the end. "A cod's head for fourpence, and nine shillings' worth of condiments to serve with it," was the favorite sarcasm which greeted the growing extravagance of the rich middle classes. Those costly "subtleties" imported from French kitchens in the fifteenth century met with a sturdy opposition from British freemen, who, even while they gaped and marvelled,

resented such bewildering innovations. The pelican sheltering her young, and Saint Catherine, book in hand, disputing to the doctors, which figured among the dishes at the coronation of Henry V., the hundred and four "dressed" peacocks trailing their plumes gorgeously over the table at the consecration of Archbishop Neville, affronted more than one beef-eating gentleman and exasperated more than one porridge-eating churl. From France, too, came certain heresies regarding the fitness of food which Englishmen had for centuries devoured and digested. Queen Elizabeth dined upon whale; Cardinal Wolsey, who was something of an epicure, and who first taught us that strawberries and cream were intended by a beneficent nature to set off each other's merits, did not disdain to have a young porpoise served up at one of his banquets. Fish soup was a delicacy, and we are even assured by antiquarians that the grampus, or sea-wolf, was freely eaten by our strong-stomached ancestors.

But foreign cooks looked doubtfully upon these national dainties, and, in place of the old-time gravies, which were simply the broths in which meat had been boiled, flavored with a little ginger and sugar, delicate and highly-seasoned sauces were devised for the tempting of weary appetites. Italy sent forks—those curious and uncanny implements which were received with scornful indignation, as calculated to destroy the simplicity and manliness of Great Britain. Spoons and knives were held in slight esteem, for good soup could be swallowed from the bowl, and his sacred Majesty Charles XII. of Sweden was not the only monarch who buttered his bread with his royal thumb. But forks were contemptible affectations. As honest Master Breton observed, he had done no foul work and handled no unwholesome thing, and consequently had no need of an instrument with which to make hay of his food and pitch it into his mouth. So, too, the time-honored custom of man and wife eating out of one trencher was falling into rapid disuse, and Walpole tells us that the old Duke and Duchess of Hamilton were the last couple in England who retained the fashion of their youth. Meats were growing daintier and dearer all the while. The ordinary or inn dinner, which in Elizabeth's day cost sixpence, had risen to tenpence in the reign of George I., and soon crept up to a shilling. In every generation there were plenty of grumblers to lament over the good old times that had fled, and we catch the echo of this

undying cry in the modern protests against unwelcome fashions. Thackeray and Trollope railed perpetually at that feeble striving after an impossible elegance which had well-nigh destroyed the cheery conviviality of their youth ; and Peacock, the prince of good livers, with whom the pleasures of the intellect and the appetite walked amicably hand in hand, has recorded his still more vehement denunciation. "I detest and abominate," says Mr. Macborrowdale, "the idea of a Siberian dinner, where you just look on fiddle-faddles while your meal is behind a screen and you are served with rations like a pauper."

The scorn of the true Briton for alien delicacies was repaid with interest by the Frenchman, who regarded his neighbor's groaning table very much as we might regard the doubtful provender of a cannibal chief. The contempt for frog-eating foreigners, on the one hand, was not greater than the contempt for beef-eating islanders, on the other ; in fact, all nations, from Egypt down, seem to have cherished a wholesome dislike and distrust for each other's food. The British officer who, at the attack on Cadiz, shouted to his men, "You Englishmen who are fed upon beef don't surely mean to be beaten by a d——d lot of Spaniards who live on oranges !" made a stronger appeal to human nature than did Napoleon with his famous "forty centuries"; and the reverse of the medal may be seen in Talleyrand's description of England as a land where there were twenty-four religions and only one sauce. Twenty-four religions would make but a poor showing in these days, when even a clever novel can beget a new one ; but sauces are not so lightly called into being. Those "slibber sops" which brought "queesiness to the stomach and disquiet to the mind" of John Lyly were hard to rout from the field ; and they were still holding their own when Brillat-Savarin, the most serene and kindly of epicures, first visited Great Britain. With Savarian eating was more than a mere vulgar pleasure ; it was a solemn and yet exquisite duty which man owed to himself and to a generous nature that had yielded him up her bounties for this purpose. Mr. Birrell says that Burke's letters on carrots "tremble with emotion," and there is a like earnestness about all of Savarin's recipes ; a pathetic anxiety lest some ingredient should be omitted or ill-used. For fish he entertains a profound respect ; for game, a manly affection ; for pastries, a delicate regard ; but truffles are the beloved darlings of his

heart. It contents him greatly to sit at table with congenial spirits; to watch "the eagerness of desire, the ecstasy of enjoyment, and, finally, the perfect repose of bliss on every countenance," when the noble meal is ended. Surely even the Reign of Terror might have dealt tenderly with such a man as this, since patriots are unswerving eaters, and it behooved them to remember that "the discovery of a new dish does more for the happiness of mankind than the discovery of a new planet."

All of Savarin's apophthegms evince the same frank and warm-hearted regard for the welfare of others; the same unremitting anxiety to teach them what to eat and how to eat it. He entreats us never to forget that, when we have invited a man to dine, we have, for a short time at least, his happiness in our hands. The dinner table, he reminds us, is the only place where men are not hopelessly bored for the first hour, and during that hour it is our privilege to make them enamored of life. A cook is, in his eyes, a true scientist, with mighty capacities for good and evil. He believes, with Baudelaire, that such a one should have the soul of a poet, and—like the too fastidious Parisian, who declared that between Mme. du Deffand's chef and that of the Marquise de Brinvilliers "there was only the difference of intention"—Savarin has no words of reproach strong enough for those who debase and shame their noble calling. He is prompt to recognize the exigencies of a slender purse, and unwearying in his efforts to provide *menus* fitted to its limitations; but his notions of economy are somewhat like those of the little French princess, who said that rather than starve she would live on bread and cheese. The famous "*omelette au thon*," for instance, with all its air of pastoral simplicity, contains the roe of two carp, a piece of tunny, an eschalot, twelve eggs, and a number of other ingredients which would hardly recommend it to a poor country parsonage. As for the Abbé Chevrier's spinach, which was warmed up with butter for seven days before it reached the acme of delicacy, we can only wonder at the admirable patience of the Abbé's cook, who would return seven times with unremitting industry to the consideration of a single dish.

It will be observed, however, how many gastronomical triumphs we owe to clerical genius, or to the researches of the true philosopher. Lord Bacon thought it no shame to bend his mighty mind to kitchen problems, and Dr. Nowel, the learned



and pious dean of St. Paul's, was rightfully proud of the bottled beer which he first gave to his astonished and grateful country. The earliest list of recipes in England was, as I have already said, the work of an archbishop. The Jesuits in the seventeenth century carried the turkey from its native haunts and introduced it to the best French society, who received it with the rapture it deserved. The famous *mayonnaise* is not the only delicacy which Richelieu bequeathed to the world; Talleyrand devoted one hour out of every busy day to the exclusive companionship of his cook; and the Regent Orleans was pleased to give his own name to the bread of his own baking.

What a kindly spirit of good-fellowship we discern in the frank epicureanism of Sidney Smith; what generous sympathy for a *bon vivant* whose lines have led him into desert places! "Luttrell came over for a day," he writes, "from whence I know not, but I thought not from good quarters; at least he had not his usual soup and patti look. There was a forced smile upon his countenance which seemed to indicate plain roast and boiled, a sort of apple-pudding depression, as if he had been staying with a clergyman." How creditable, too, is his anxiety to please Luttrell, when that amicable sybarite becomes *his* guest! "Mrs. Sidney," he declares, "grows pale with alarm as the rich dishes are uncovered"; and yet so admirable a housewife might have shared in the superb confidence of Lord Worcester when cautioned by Sir Henry Halford to leave all such indiscreet messes alone. "Side dishes," said the great physician, "are poison." "Yours may be," retorted Lord Worcester; "and I should never dream of eating them, but mine are a very different story." So, too, were Sidney Smith's, and the celebrated salad which gained for him nearly as wide a reputation as his wit was only one of many famous recipes, and probably no greater in its way than the mysterious pudding whose secret he imparted as an especial favor to the importunate Lady Holland. Those who had the happiness of sitting at his table rose from it with tranquil gratitude, "serenely full," and conscious, let us hope, of his own graceful sentiment,

"Fate cannot harm me—I have dined to-day."

There is one more subject to consider; one more aspect of the case, fraught with tender and melancholy associations. Like the

lost joys of our youth ; like the taste for apple-dumplings, which Lamb recognized as belonging only to those whose innocence was unimpaired ; like the vanishing of gentle thoughts with a growing distaste for asparagus ; so is the sorrowful blank left in our lives by the recollection of noble dishes that have been, and that are no longer. What of that lost recipe of Menander's for fish sauce—an ambrosial sauce whose fame has flitted down to us from dim ages, and the eating of which would have filled to the brim Dr. Johnson's cup of happiness ? And what of its modern counterpart, now also gone forever, the famous green sauce which La Coste offered to Sir Thomas Dundas at the Duke of York's table, whispering to him with unctuous fervor, “ *Avec cette sauce là, on pourrait manger son grand-père* ” ? What of the bream-pie that disappeared with the good monks, driven from British soil, and the mere recollection of which caused Peacock to bewail in spirit the too rapid dissolution of the monasteries ? And what of sack—*Falstaff's* sack—that made England the merry England of yore, and that took flight, like some old-fashioned genius, before the sombre days that were to follow ? Surely if we knew its secret, we should learn how to laugh once more.

But alas ! this may not be. We have but the memories of past good cheer ; we have but the echoes of departed laughter. In vain we look and listen for the mirth that has died away. In vain we seek to question the gray ghosts of old-time revellers.

“Still shall this burden their answer bear,  
What has become of last year's snow ?”

AGNES REPPLIER.